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ABSTRACT

This issue of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) News is devoted to "Equipped for the Future" (EFF), the organization's long-term collaborative initiative for system reform. The newsletter contains the testimony of people who have been involved in the process over the past 2 years, speaking of the promise they see in EFF. The following articles are included: "Equipped for the Future: A Collaborative Journey toward System Reform" (from the partnership developing the initiative); "Voices from the Field: A Sample" (Patricia McNeil, Sue Lauritano, Benita Somerfield, Bob Bickerton); "Voices from the Field: Students" (John Zickefoose, Gail Sams); "Voices from the Field: State Directors" (Israel Mendoza, Cheryl Keenan, Lennox McLendon); "The Role of Citizen" (Brenda Bell); "The Role of Parent" (Meta Potts); "The Role of Worker" (Lisa Levinson); "Voices from the Field: Practitioners" (Inaam Mansoor, Bonnie Fortini, Barbara King, Louise Clifton); and "Voices from the Field: Other Systems" (Kay Albright, Ken Nelson, Irwin Kirsch, Paul Cole, Katherine T. Mance). (KC)

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

NIFL News

Volume 4, Number 2 Spring 1997

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From the Director

This issue of *NIFL NEWS* is devoted to *Equipped for the Future*, our long-term collaborative initiative for system reform. We believe that *Equipped for the Future* can provide the vision and framework for what adult education and literacy must be in the 21st century—a customer-driven system with specific, measurable standards that lead to real-life outcomes for all adults who seek to improve their basic skills.

Equipped for the Future is not the creation of the NIFL alone. It has grown out of the history of our field, the current trend toward standards-based system reform in education, and—most significantly—the words of adult learners themselves. *EFF* continues to be the product of extensive collaborative work among growing numbers of individuals, organizations, and states across the nation. We would not even consider undertaking *EFF* without your support and involvement.

This newsletter is filled with the testimony of people who have been involved in the process over the past two years, speaking of the promise they see in *EFF*. We hope you will be inspired to get involved in creating the *EFF* standards and using them to shape a system that can better serve us all.

It will take the sustained good will and cooperation of our national literacy community to make sure *Equipped for the Future* can fulfill its potential—for our field, and for the future of lifelong learning in America. Please join us.

Andy Hartman

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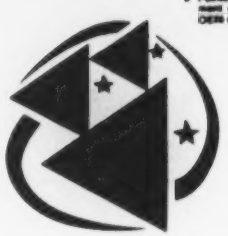

Equipped for the Future:

A Collaborative Journey toward System Reform

The Background

By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

National Educational Goal 6

The seeds for *Equipped for the Future* were planted when Congress charged the National Institute for Literacy with the mandate to measure progress toward National Educational Goal 6—the goal of a fully literate America. We could not even begin without a more precise definition of Goal 6, and a consensus about how we in the adult education and lifelong learning field will know it has been achieved. The real question was: "What do adults need to know and be able to do to be literate, compete in a global economy, and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?"

To come up with a meaningful answer, the NIFL went directly to the customers themselves and asked adult learners nationwide what the goal meant to them. Their responses gave us an unprecedented body of data about the rich purposes literacy serves in the lives of adults—purposes that extend the definition of literacy far beyond the traditional basic skills of reading, writing, and math. *Equipped for the Future* was launched by learners, whose words laid the foundation for collaborative system reform.

We already knew that both American adults and the system that serves them face major challenges. The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) and its international follow-up, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), showed that too high a proportion of American adults tested at the lowest levels of proficiency, and that the U.S. is in danger of lagging behind other developed

In This Issue:

What *EFF* Is

From the Director 1
Equipped for the Future 1
The Role of Citizen 8–9
The Role of Parent 10–11
The Role of Worker 12–13

Voices from the field on *EFF*

A Sample 4
Students 5
State Directors 6–7
Practitioners 14–16
Other Systems 17–19

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The Vision

Equipped for the Future's vision for the 21st century is an adult education and lifelong learning system focused on results that really matter in the lives of adults. This system will be the product of broad collaboration in the field, grounded in learners' own perceptions of their needs, and of benefit to everyone:

- **Adult learners** will have access to programs that help them pinpoint and meet their real-life learning needs. They will be able to identify and build on what they already know. They will gain skills that can be used in all their adult roles—as parents, workers, and citizens.
- **Adult education practitioners and administrators** will have a powerful set of tools for linking curriculum and instruction with real-world outcomes for adults. They will have a framework that allows them to define, measure, and document progress. They will be able to develop better methods of technical assistance, training, and program assessment.
- **Funders and policymakers** will be able to base their decisions about adult education on documented results. They will have evidence of the system's contributions to urgent national goals like employability and self-sufficiency.
- **Workplace, community, and education leaders** will see precisely how their interests and concerns are linked to adult education and lifelong learning. They will be assured that the adult education system can help adults gain the skills needed for work, further education and training, better parenting, and active citizenship. They will be better able to work together as partners in linking programs of human resource development.

nations. On top of this, the General Accounting Office's 1995 report on adult education and literacy described the difficulties in evaluating a system that does not have clearly defined objectives, appropriate student assessments, or accurate data. To be literate in the 1990s requires greater skills and knowledge than ever before, but we haven't known exactly what skills and knowledge need to be taught, or how to measure our success in teaching them.

The Approach

A system that cannot assess its own progress cannot improve itself, and we cannot measure progress without first agreeing on what we are trying to achieve. To enlist the adult education and lifelong learning field in creating a system that could produce—and demonstrate—better real-life results for adults, the NIFL chose the route of standards development. The goals of *Equipped for the Future*'s standards-based system reform are to—

- reach consensus about the key skills and knowledge that adults need in order to be successful as workers, parents, and citizens.
- identify effective models for teaching and learning this body of skills and knowledge.
- find ways of assessing whether adults are improving their knowledge and skills as a result of participating in our programs.

Standards are key to the kind of reform our system needs. Without dictating curriculum or instructional method, standards will tell us specifically what should be taught and learned, and whether it is being taught and learned successfully.

Equipped for the Future is linking its work closely to the movement toward national and state standards for K–12 education and occupational skill standards. As with these reform efforts, it will take a fundamental rethinking of our system's basic goals and a thorough analysis of what it will take to get the job done for us to make significant improvements in how we serve adults. These are the tasks that *Equipped for the Future* is mobilizing our field to do.

The Process

Equipped for the Future is currently finishing the first and most important of six collaborative stages (see page 3):

Stage I—Building Consensus
Phase 1:

In 1993, 1,500 adult students from 149 programs in 34 states told us in their own words what National Educational Goal 6 meant to them. Their responses pointed to four major purposes for literacy. In order to fulfill their adult roles as parents, citizens, and workers, adults said they need to—

- gain **access** to information so they can orient themselves in the world;
- give **voice** to ideas, so that they will be heard and can have an impact on the world around them;
- make decisions and **act independently**;
- **build a bridge to the future**, by learning how to learn in order to keep up with the world as it changes.

These four purposes incorporate the multitude of goals that bring adult learners to our system. They are the framework for *Equipped for the Future*.

Phase 2:

During 1996, eight pilot projects worked with key literacy stakeholders in 16 states to test the suitability of the four purposes as a foundation

for system reform. Several thousand people, including adult learners and practitioners, participated in a consensus-building process—focus groups, workshops, inquiry projects—to examine the four purposes across the adult roles of parent, worker, and community member.

Phase 3:

In 1997, the NIFL awarded grants to three *EFF* Development Partners. Each Partner heads up a consortium of local, state, and national constituents that is focused on broadening the base of consensus-building and using the four purposes to develop comprehensive "role maps" for each of the adult roles. The role maps identify broad areas of responsibility and key activities for each role, and specify the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for successful performance of each activity. These maps of what adults need to know and be able to do will pave the way for standards that can apply across the three adult roles.

Stage II will begin in summer 1997, when the Development Partners use the role maps to identify content standards and performance indicators. Stage III will take place during the 1997-98 school year, when Development Partners work with practitioners across the nation to pilot the standards in a broad range of learning contexts and determine if they meet our "standards for standards," to assure that they are:

- written in clear, simple, and direct language.
- comprehensive enough to demystify the route to success for adult learners.
- specific enough to be useful to teachers without dictating curriculum, materials, or methods.
- focused enough to be useful to suppliers like textbook publishers and software developers.

The pilot process for *EFF* standards will help us identify what kinds of teacher materials and assessment tools will be most appropriate, what larger-scale changes are necessary, and what additional resources are required to support those changes.

Equipped for the Future is well on its way to creating an adult education and lifelong learning system that offers strong, meaningful results and continuous improvement for all its customers. Building consensus from the bottom up in an enterprise of this scope is difficult, intimidating, frustrating, time-consuming—and, according to participants like those contributing to this newsletter, absolutely worth the effort. The success of *Equipped for the Future* is within our reach, and YOUR support and involvement are KEY. ■

Equipped for the Future's Six Stages

Stage 1
Build consensus on what adults need to know and be able to do to achieve the four purposes in relation to adults' roles as parents, citizens, and workers.

Stage 2
Develop content standards and performance indicators that translate this knowledge and skills into a clear set of results for adult literacy and basic skills.

Stage 3
Pilot the standards in adult learning sites across the country to test how well they work in the broad range of adult learning contexts.

Stage 4
Determine what needs to be done to focus the adult literacy and basic skills system on achieving these results.

Stage 5
Identify what resources are necessary to assure that the system can be held accountable for meeting these results.

Stage 6
Develop quality assurance mechanisms that allow for continuous improvement based on continuous assessment of results.

EFF Development Partners

Consortium for the Role of Citizen
led by:

Center for Literacy Studies
University of Tennessee-Knoxville
Brenda Bell, Project Director

New England Literacy Resource Center
Silja Kallenbach, Regional Coordinator

Mayor's Commission on Literacy—Philadelphia
Linda Kern, Inquiry Project Coordinator

Consortium for the Role of Parent
led by:

The National Center for Family Literacy
Meta Potts, Project Director
Andy Hayes, Research Director

Consortium for the Role of Worker
led by:

The Center for Adult Literacy and Learning
University of Maine-Orono
Lisa Levinson, Project Director

State Partners:

Arizona, California, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin

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Voices from the Field: A Sample

▼ Patricia McNeil

Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education

The strength of *EFF* is that it will help us articulate what adults need to know and be able to do to be effective parents, citizens, and workers. *EFF* should help inform the development of a performance measurement system—it will help identify the competencies students should have and what they have actually achieved. *EFF* can be an important part of our efforts to improve student achievement and inform policymakers of the return on investment in adult education. It can help us get beyond the well-meaning to the well-doing.

▼ Sue Lauritano

Student, Franklin County Adult Basic Education, Maine

EFF can get people on the right road. What's different about *EFF* is that it's more attuned to what people really need to know to actually do something; it's not all pie in the sky stuff. Most people who come to ABE realize that they shouldn't have quit school, and I can see a way to build in *EFF* to what they need to learn. In ABE, most clients want something specific. The people who say "teach me" are often the ones who've given up on learning. These are the folks who can really be helped by *EFF*.

EFF gives direction for everyone — it helps everyone plan. It helps teachers plan how to help students learn, and it helps students plan how to live their lives.

▼ Benita Somerfield

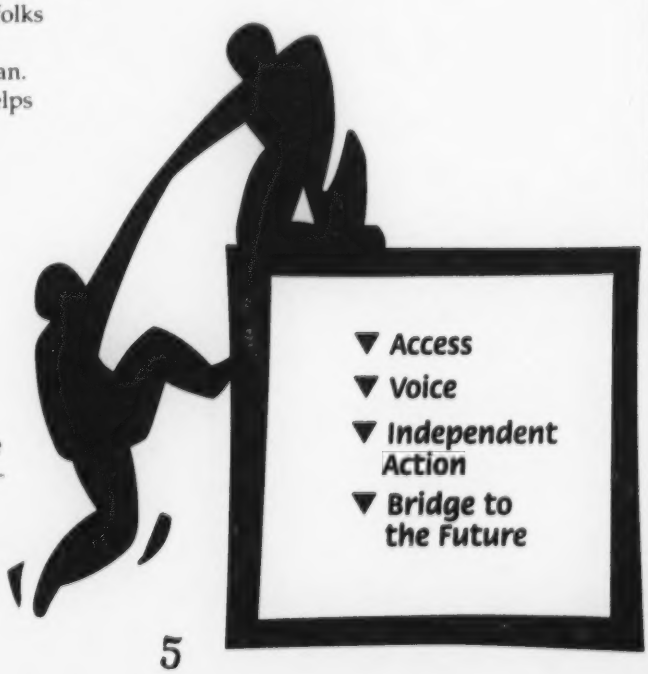
Executive Director
Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy

"It's tremendously important that we rethink and revise our adult literacy programs to be sure they deliver the *content* as well as the skills adults need to function optimally in our increasingly complex world. That's why *Equipped for the Future* is such an exciting and important project for our field. It promises to deliver rich and relevant content, as well as skills that really matter."

▼ Bob Bickerton

Director, Adult and Community Learning Services
Massachusetts Department of Education

"EFF provides us with a compelling frame for developing content and, ultimately, performance standards. I've never believed that adult education should be taking discrete academic knowledge and putting it together like building blocks. Adult education is about adults taking control of their lives—in their families, in their communities, and at the workplace. A missing piece in our work has too often been how citizenship and community work fit into what adult educators do. It's not just how the community affects students, but how they and their families affect the community. What EFF is saying is: these are the things we COULD and should be doing. We have to put EFF into our content frameworks, so that teachers can see how to use it, not just to qualify people for diplomas, but also for taking control of their lives."



Voices from the Field: Students

"EFF gives people tools that allow them to act in ways they never thought they could."

From an interview with John Zickefoose
Student Liaison, Corona Public Library, California

Before *Equipped for the Future*, I was traveling all over California, doing workshops for learners about getting involved in the voting process. I talked a lot about how we DO make a difference, and how we're cheating ourselves if we don't get involved. And with every workshop, I'd see a transformation; I'd see students walk away thinking, "I really CAN make a difference; I SHOULD step up to the plate."

Now *EFF* has given us a new way to get into the process. It's not just about learning to read and write, but about becoming part of a community. So many of us haven't been there for fear of being found out as poor readers and writers. *EFF* is taking us the next step, from being literate to being full human beings. It's a big hurdle and it can be terrifying, learning how to be a part of the community. *EFF* helps lower the hurdle, not just for learners but for teachers and administrators, too. It offers a whole new way of teaching, where everyone works together as a community.

I'm really positive about the *EFF* process, because it's being done so carefully. Something this big can't happen overnight, and you can't cram it down people's throats. You need buy-in and input from a whole range of different people.

Adult learners are so diverse and different from one another, and *EFF* offers a flexible, tangible framework that teachers can adapt and use for their own communities. It's like an infinitely useful lesson plan, and you can start wherever students are. I hope administrators and teachers will see how useful and simple the *EFF* role maps are, and how students can learn academic skills through real-life projects.

When you're trying to learn as an adult, you'll learn quicker if you're doing things that matter to you. If I'm writing a letter to get a stoplight for my child's school, I'll be more concerned about writing the RIGHT kind of letter. That's how *EFF* improves academic skills and accelerates the learning process.

But there are more changes than just the academic. I visited a class in Philadelphia, where everyone was working on getting donations for a woman who had been attacked. Just listening to the learners speak, I knew their lives had been changed, that they were coming away from this as better, stronger people. Nothing else could give learners this range of tools—courage, self-confidence, self-esteem. These skills don't end with the particular learning experience.

One of our goals in America is to get people involved and engaged with their communities, whether the community is a street or a town or a city. *EFF* gives people tools that allow them to act in ways they never thought they could—it's a process that doesn't cost a lot but can make a big difference, wherever you live.

I'm a parent, and becoming an active member of my community has made me a better parent. I don't know any textbook I could get this out of, any book that could tell me about how to be part of my community. That's what EFF does. As far as I'm concerned, this is the essence of lifelong learning. ■

"It's like you're reaching out for something that will pass you by if you don't grab on and hold tight."

from an interview with Gail Sams, Erwin Tennessee

I was really surprised back at the beginning of *EFF*, when our class was asked what WE thought about National Education Goal 6. It was so great that people were asking our opinion and wanting us to get involved.

I didn't go to high school. I got married and had four kids who all went through high school, but for myself, I always knew something was lacking. I wanted to get my GED, but I really didn't know if I could do it. That's the thing; kids drop out of school and never realize how important education is. That's what is so neat about *EFF*: it shows people—especially women—that they have all these opportunities, and that they can learn to do anything they want.

Now that I've got my GED, I see that it's just the beginning. There've been so many changes in the world, and you have to keep on learning—about technology, about all the new things that affect jobs and day-to-day living. *EFF* helped me see how important this is. It's like you're reaching out for something that will pass you by if you don't grab on and hold tight.

Voices from the field: State Directors

"Adult education and literacy are at the heart of the success of all the government programs that are trying to fix things for our people."

from an interview with Israel Mendoza, Director, Office of Adult Literacy, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

When I first heard of *Equipped for the Future*, I wasn't even working in education. I was in Employment Services and a member of the governor's adult education advisory council. Even then I thought it was a good thing; if the whole effort was going to be based on what learners were saying, then it had to be good. Lots of us say we know what learners want, but this is really them talking. And another thing—as a system, we haven't been doing a great job of showing other people what we do. When anyone mentions outcomes or results, we get defensive instead of energized and excited. We don't communicate a strong enough conviction about the importance of what we're doing. *EFF* is starting a process where we can come together and show the world the difference we can make in people's lives.

Today I'm even more excited about *EFF* than I was in the beginning. I see even greater strength in the process. *EFF* is developing from a research base; it's technically sound. Academics are looking at it and saying, yes, this IS the right way to go.

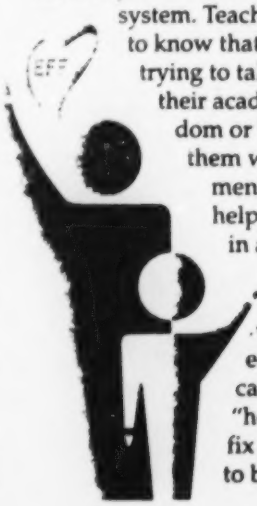
The consensus-building process is getting us all invested more and more deeply in *EFF*. Every step of the way, we check ourselves and come to consensus. Every decision takes us further down the road.

The major challenge is change. Everyone has a hard time with it. If you helped to create the status quo, or if you've figured out how to make it work for you even a little, then it's particularly hard. Our real challenge is to let our fellow adult educators know that *EFF* is building on the foundation they've been laying for years. As a field, we need to salute the educators who paved the way to *EFF*. We need to celebrate their accomplishments and ask them to help us move into the future. *EFF* is the glue that can pull together all the good things that are already happening in the system. We won't have to be defensive about outcomes anymore. We'll finally have a common voice that everyone can understand—employers, practitioners, politicians, everyone. The standards will give us that voice.

As a person from an employment background, here's my vision: adult education and literacy are at the heart of the success of all the government programs that are trying to fix things for our people. Most programs are quick solutions to long-term problems—crime, health issues, welfare. Literacy is at the heart. *EFF* gives us the language that can really communicate this to people.

EFF includes everybody. Adult learners have been out there on their own, trying to figure out how to do it, and in a certain sense, so have teachers and administrators. *EFF* is a way to help us all, and to involve us in figuring out how we can best be helped. We all have something valuable to contribute.

The real job is within our own system. Teachers have to know that we're not trying to take away their academic freedom or burden them with requirements. *EFF* will help them work in a different, more responsive way. Adult education can't be about "how do we fix you;" it has to be about



Cheryl Keenan, Director, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Instruction Pennsylvania Department of Education

"I'm a firm believer in defining what knowledge, skills, and abilities people need to have, so that adult education programs can provide good instruction in meaningful contexts. The creation of standards around [adult] roles will be really practically useful to teachers in selecting curriculum. *EFF* will provide consistency across the system, with enough flexibility so that teachers can make their own choices about instruction. Once you set standards at the state level that guide curriculum and instruction, it becomes very important to have guidance in assessment to see that adults are learning what they say they need, and *EFF* links assessment with instruction and curriculum. This initiative has major implications for state and local accountability; it will let us show that we're doing what we set out to do."

"how do we help you live your lives." Our teachers know that. They certainly aren't in the business for the pay or glory; they're in it to help students succeed. And their hearts will tell them that *EFF*'s the way.

Another reason I wanted to get involved, which had to do with why I left the labor field for education, is that I think the adult education field is in an especially good position to change. Most other fields are bound by a lot of history and tradition, and change means doing away with all of that. But adult education is a dynamic, flexible, young system. With all the other programs being reauthorized and reshaped, we can position ourselves to convince them that nothing can be done successfully without looking at adult education.

For us state directors, this is our chance to show our stakeholders that we're not afraid of accountability and outcomes, that we're willing to struggle for a common language, that we can bring recognition to our people who work so hard. We can show other systems that they need us, that without us their programs are revolving doors. It's a way to look at the future positively, rather than "oh no, now what are they going to do with us?" We want some kind of accountability and data collection system; we know good things are happening, but we can't show it yet.

Administrators need to see that they're leaders in this whole process of change. In the same way that we help our students learn about being citizens, we have to help local administrators be leaders, and *EFF* gives us the tools.

EFF is all about accountability and how to talk about it so that everyone can understand. With *EFF* we can say: this is what our students want, and this is how we help them get it. This is where we're going, how we're going to get there, and why we're going this way. We don't have to be afraid to say that this approach to learning can be the solution to the whole range of human problems. ■

Voices from the field: State Directors

"*Equipped for the Future* is the right thing to do at this point in the history of adult education."

from an interview with Lennox McLendon
Associate Director, Adult Employment Training
Virginia Department of Education

When I was first introduced to *Equipped for the Future* and the four purposes, it was like a flash of light. The purposes cut across all instructional contexts. The members of our performance indicator work group were excited about the implications, and they developed three domains around which to build instruction—personal, academic, and learning skills. *EFF*'s four purposes, coupled with the three instructional domains, give us a clearer understanding of what our broad aims are as educators—they go way beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic, beyond literacy.

EFF is the right thing to do at this point in the history of adult education. It's the next major step forward in understanding for our field. In the '70's, it was the Adult Performance Level study and the revelation that adult education has to be related to life skills. In the '80's, we learned new, critical things about social networks and participatory learning from people like Hanna Fingeret. And now *EFF* is taking us to a whole new level.

What's fascinating for me is to watch teachers look at the four purposes and say, "this is the kind of learning we've seen happening, but we've never had a way to record it and demonstrate it." With *EFF*, we're looking at a system that will help teachers improve their instruction and report the real impact on personal, academic, and learning development.

And *EFF* strengthens our ability to involve learners in planning and evaluating their own learning, in becoming both independent and interdependent learners. Learning shouldn't be this box that we hold back as a mystery from the students. They need access to all available information about how learning works.

We believe that every practitioner is a researcher and every learner a curriculum. *EFF* clarifies each role. As a result, it may mean more work for practitioners, but our services will be better and learners more successful. Our job as state staff is to build the support systems and resources and program structures that will allow program managers, teachers, and tutors to incorporate *EFF* and respond to the learners' needs.

EFF gives us a way to talk to policymakers, to say, "this is the kind of learning that happens in our classrooms. It's a lot more than the GED. It's about giving people access, equipping them to make decisions and run their own lives, giving them a voice."

What I'd like to say to other state directors about *EFF* is, "read it. It's right there in the students' own words. We work so hard to stay grounded in what learners are all about, and *EFF* is all about learners, from beginning to end." ■

The Role of Citizen

Brenda Bell,
Project Director,
Civic Participation Standards Development Project, Center for Literacy Studies
Knoxville , Tennessee

"I couldn't be an active, responsible member of my community until I learned more about how to get involved . . . and found out that my involvement could actually make a difference, for me and my neighbors.

Comments like these are why the Center for Literacy Studies, the Mayor's Commission on Literacy, and New England Literacy Resource Center joined forces to continue the development of the citizen role for *Equipped for the Future*. Our work in Phase II of *EFF* reinforced our conviction that civic participation has a place in adult literacy and basic education, and that we have much to offer civic groups and community organizations that are trying to strengthen citizen participation skills.

We're keenly aware of the crisis in civic participation in this country. America depends on active, informed citizens and community members who contribute to public life. At the same time, we're faced with the fragmentation of adult basic education and lifelong learning services nationwide. Our field needs voluntary standards to unite and guide our work. Above all, we were caught up in the *EFF* vision—the vision of a system of adult learning and literacy that is built around what adults really need to know and be able to do in their primary life roles, not around what we expect of children in grades K–12.

Using the citizen role map as our starting point, we are well into the work of building consensus about the skills and knowledge needed by citizens and community members to participate fully in a democracy. We are holding structured feedback sessions in nine states, where we partner with state literacy resource centers and offices of adult basic education to convene groups of key stakeholders and active citizens.

In these same nine states, adult education practitioners and adult learners have been engaged in a process of inquiry into the role map's utility in a variety of teaching and learning situations. Our national advisory group of representatives from national civic and adult education organizations is helping develop the national strategy for consensus-building and standards development.

As we work with groups across the country, we hear widespread appreciation for the *EFF* standards development and system reform process. People especially applaud the fact that *EFF* started from the writings of adult learners and is involving adult learners every step of the way. Members of grassroots community organizations, as well as elected government officials, are impressed that we ask them what they know and do as active citizens and community members. As a discussion starter, this question is a gem, and it's gotten us exactly what we' re looking for—the widest possible range of opinions on the citizen role map!

Our national advisory committee has helped us identify challenges facing our work: How can we develop a fully elaborated citizen role map and standards that truly reflect the breadth of views on citizenship and civic participation? Will we leave someone's voice out? In a political climate of mixed opinions about national standards, how do we communicate our vision of system reform, where voluntary standards will be a useful guide, not a regulatory burden?

In the meantime, we are carried along by the excitement of the process—the wholehearted engagement of practitioners and learners, and the enthusiastic support of people active in community organizations and civic groups. The four purposes for literacy and lifelong learning resonate with participants; they make sense for our partners and the worlds of people they know. The task is to build a system around the four purposes and key adult roles and, in the process, contribute to participatory democracy in this country.

One of our own students put it very well: "[A] bridge to the Future . . . [Here's] one of the ways I interpret that: each one of us is working to try to make this world a better place. . . . that's really a key to being a good citizen—to care enough to do that." ■

CITIZEN ROLE MAP

Effective citizens and community members take informed action to make a positive difference in their lives, communities, and world.

Become and Stay Informed

- Identify and monitor problems, community needs, strengths and resources.
- Recognize and understand your human and legal rights and civic responsibilities.
- Figure out how systems (political, economic, and social service) work.
- Find, interpret, and analyze diverse sources of information (including own experience).
- Identify how to have an impact.

Form and Express Opinions and Ideas

- Develop a sense of self that reflects your history, values, beliefs and roles in the larger community.
- Listen to and learn from others' experiences and ideas.
- Communicate so that others understand.
- Reflect on and reevaluate your opinions and ideas.

Equipped for the future

Take Action to Strengthen Communities

- Help self and others.
- Educate self and others.
- Exercise your human and legal rights and civic responsibilities.
- Influence decision makers and hold them accountable.
- Be a leader within your community.

Working Together

- Get involved in the community and get others involved.
- Respect others and value diversity.
- Define common values and goals and resolve conflict.
- Participate in group processes and decision making.

The Role of Parent

Meta Potts
Project Director, Standards Development for the Role of Parent/Family Member
National Center for Family Literacy, Louisville, Kentucky

Adult education students have many dimensions. These learners seek better literacy skills to increase their life chances, and to guide and direct them toward better citizenship, more fulfilling jobs, and quality parenting. Each of these three roles has assumed a position of importance in *Equipped for the Future*, as we work together to discover how teachers and learners can interact to find out more about what adults need to know and be able to do in order to live successful and satisfying lives. Of the three roles, parenting has been the least addressed in traditional adult education classes. We may have found it too difficult to define "good parenting"—perhaps because of varying perspectives about that responsibility, or because we have not thought of the parenting role as "teachable." Whatever the reason, any focus on parenting was often left to counselors or religious leaders.

Now we know better. Adult students themselves and other successful parents are giving us guidance. In 1995, as participants in focus groups organized by the National Center for Family Literacy in six areas around the nation, adult students identified their parent role as primary, and they were resolute in their desire to learn more about what it takes to be a "good parent." Their concerns began with the physical basics of being able to provide good food and adequate shelter and extended to uncertainty about issues like structure in their lives and values and violence. "We need to know how to help our kids in school and in the neighborhood," one mother said. "How can I help them if I don't know how to talk to the teacher or the neighbors?"

Good parenting means more than providing "things," adults told us. "It is knowing how to give of yourself—your time and understanding." Having heard so much about "quality time," they searched for a definition of that term and polled their groups to determine whether anyone knew. "I try to do for my kids," a worried single mother responds, "but life gets busier and busier, and we barely see each other." Distracted by the stress of everyday hustle, this woman sought ways of learning how to handle her life. And so the topic switched to that need—how to manage and balance our lives.

In these conversations, we confirmed that the role of parent must be included in the current standards development process. From the mountains of data collected in these focus groups, topics and themes emerged and became fixed, or so we thought. Just when we thought we knew how to manage the lot, we discovered that themes overlapped and bled into each other, and other issues surfaced. If we were going to develop standards based on the data, we needed to become more deliberate and more focused. We collapsed fifteen broad areas of parental responsibility into eight, then six, and now these three: a parent needs to be able to manage a family, support children's development, and manage personal growth.

Within these areas of responsibility, we could identify role indicators, key skills, and activities. We were pleased to see that adult educators could build curriculum and teach quality classes based on the data, which include access to information about parenting, the ability to use that information to problem-solve with and for children, the opportunity to speak up and speak out for the rights and responsibilities of families, and the knowledge that we can have enough control over our lives to plan for the future.

But before we assume too much, before we begin to set our sights on curricular guidelines, we must go again to the people who hold the biggest share in the development of standards for parent education. This year, we return to parents and other stakeholders across the nation to guide us as we move from conceptual frameworks and role maps toward the specifics that must surface from the beliefs and values associated with being a successful parent. It is from that developmental process that the standards for the role of parent will finally be written.

The most exciting discoveries are in front of us: how to merge those three adult life areas—worker, citizen, and parent—into common content and methodologies for teaching and learning. Adult education will never be the same.

PARENT ROLE MAP

An effective parent/family member provides for needs of all family members

Manage a Family

- Provide for emotional needs.
- Provide for physical needs.
- Form and maintain supportive family relationships.
- Find and use community resources and services.
- Manage time and resources.

Plan and Manage Personal Growth

- Create vision of future for self and other family members, including children, and work to achieve it.
- Pursue personal self-improvement.
- Give and receive support outside immediate family.

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Support Children's Development

- Serve as role model for children.
- Pass on values, ethics, and cultural heritage.
- Teach children.
- Establish rules and expectations for children's behavior.
- Participate in children's formal education.
- Provide nurturing home environment.

The Role of Worker

Lisa Levinson,
Project Director, Developing Standards for the Adult as Worker, Center for Adult Learning and Literacy, University of Maine-Orono

In some ways, I feel as though I have been involved with *Equipped for the Future* throughout my career in adult education. The vision of a customer-driven system based on success for the future was one I had been carrying around in my heart, but could not define in my head. Equipped for the Future clarified it for my head, and lifted my heart.

Maine Adult Education adopted *Equipped for the Future* as its standards development framework in August, 1995. We received a Phase 2 *EFF* grant to continue the development process, and joined with other projects in exploring what the four purposes meant to adult learners, practitioners, stakeholders, policymakers, businesses, and other systems.

Statistics show that literacy and lifelong learning are intricately connected to economic development and growth. Looking at the worker was a way for us to explore how to make this connection clear, to give both adult learners and service providers a path to follow, and to link business and industry and other systems in a reform initiative to ensure every adult can succeed in a changing world.

The Center for Adult Learning and Literacy of the University of Maine has partnered with the governor's office in North Carolina, Vermont Adult Learning, the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and the Workforce Investment Network in Virginia, as well as the national Adult Numeracy Practitioners Network (ANPN), to explore what adults need to know and be able to do to be successful in a changing economy.

Each state is using a different industry as a lens for the worker role map so that we can be sure the resulting map crosses industries and contexts. Maine, Vermont, and parts of Virginia and North Carolina are very rural. Ohio and parts of Virginia and North Carolina are urban and industrialized. The industries each state will target are: Maine—retail sales, Vermont—health care, Virginia—food manufacturing, North Carolina—metal manufacturing, and Ohio—heavy manufacturing. The Adult Numeracy Practitioners Network, a national group of math practitioners, will integrate math into the map. Phase 2 efforts will help identify the math knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the key activities of a worker who is equipped for the future.

Each state has convened a working group of business and labor representatives of the targeted industry; adult education practitioners and state director; representatives of other standards initiatives, welfare-to-work, and job training agencies and providers; policymakers; customers; and other stakeholders. This group is helping to connect *EFF* with other state initiatives, identify effective workers for role map validation sessions, and participate in shaping the worker map.

On a national level, we're guided by input from a National Advisory Council that includes representatives of the other standards movements, targeted industries, and literacy and job training providers. O*NET, the Skills and Industry Standards, New Standards, and SCANS initiatives are all active Council participants. It is important that the Worker Role connect with the other labor initiatives so that we are articulating with other standards initiatives and not reinventing the wheel. Our groups are all trying to provide a new definition of basic skills, one that leads to worker and employer success for today and the future.

We're making our way through the role map validation process, first using high performance workers and then a wider group of stakeholders, and questions keep surfacing—about the process itself, what standards are and should be, how employers and employees will use this, and what the adult literacy community should provide. Questions will continue to arise, but we know, from the excitement, involvement, and buy-in of participants, that we are on the right path.

On a recent panel for one of Maine's Private Industry Councils, the vice president of a major bank said about the role map, "This is what we're talking about when we talk about basic skills, isn't it?" It was exciting to hear an important employer make the leap to understanding that basic skills are not just reading and writing. It will be just as exciting when adults use the role maps to navigate their paths to success in their adult roles, and adult practitioners use them to help learners attain that success. *EFF* has the potential to clear heads and lift hearts all over America. ■

WORKER ROLE MAP

An effective worker keeps pace with the demands of a changing economy.

Doing the Work

- Organize, plan, and prioritize work and use resources.
- Manage work processes and resources.
- Use technology and other work tools.
- Put ideas and directions into action.
- Meet new work challenges.
- Take responsibility for work quality and results.

Working With Others

- Communicate with others inside and outside the organization.
- Direct and motivate others.
- Teach and develop others.
- Assist others.
- Negotiate differences and build common plans.
- Develop and maintain relationships with others.

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Managing the Work Context

- Use organizational goals, performance, structure, culture, and values to inform actions.
- Employ information on industry trends and competitive forces to guide work activities.

Planning and Directing Personal and Professional Growth

- Plan and renew career goals.
- Base planning on labor market information.
- Find and get a job.
- Learn new skills.
- Balance and support work, career, and personal goals.

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Voices from the Field: Practitioners

"We need to be mindful of our students' visions for themselves in everything we do."

from an interview with Inaam Mansoor
Director, ARlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), Virginia

When I first became aware of *EFF*, we had already invested several years of inquiry into alternative assessment methods. With performance indicators required at both the state and national levels, we had to begin to better systematize our efforts and establish standards for performance. But what was that performance? The way adults articulated the four purposes for learning in the *EFF* report meshed with what we were observing about changes in learners' abilities, and with what our teachers were saying constituted success: changes in linguistic abilities, changes in the affective area, and changes in the cognitive area.

The four purposes offered a framework, a lens through which we could examine teaching, learning, and evaluation. I like the four key words in the *EFF* framework—as one of my teachers said jokingly, 'We use them as a kind of mantra to keep us focused." *Access.* It's crucial. If we don't help our learners access information from the wide variety of sources bombarding us, we can end up with a kind of information apartheid In this country. *Voice.* We are an agency that helps people develop communication skills, so giving voice to issues and concerns is central to our work. *Acting independently.* Just ask teachers how they know students are making progress. It's evidence of growing confidence that you'll probably hear first—the willingness to speak up in class and take risks in using language in and out of the classroom. *Skills for continued learning.* Again, this meshed with what our teachers claimed as success: the development of learning strategies that learners can apply to new situations.

First, we wanted all our teachers to learn about the *EFF* study and consider the implications for teaching, learning, evaluation, and the use of technology. For example, we asked teachers, "What are you doing to help students achieve these four purposes?" We use a learner-centered, competency based approach in our curriculum, and teachers were able to identify how the purposes fit in.

Next, we brought together a team of teachers to further investigate *EFF* and project-based learning. At our second *EFF* inservice, this team demonstrated how the four purposes seem to naturally emerge through project-based learning activities. This was probably one of the most successful inservices we've ever had. Both new and experienced teachers, seemed to agree on the merits of approaching instruction this way.

Teachers who conducted these projects invited other teachers to watch or interact in the presentations. One student involved in a project to develop a class news broadcast said, "At first, I thought this was terrible. I didn't come here to play games, I came here to learn English. But then I had to do so much reading and writing for this project that I ended up amazed at how much I learned." And the teacher, asked about how much time it took to prepare the students for this project, said, " I didn't really have to do anything; I just guided them, and they did all the work." I overheard a student from another class ask his teacher, "When are we going to do something like this?"

So, I guess what I like about *EFF* is that it's not something you pile on top of curriculum requirements for teachers, but rather a lens through which they can better fulfill them. And I think the lens can be applied to a variety of teaching philosophies. It's clearly very learner-centered and participatory and works well in competency-based approaches, too.

I hope people from all levels of the adult education field take a closer look at EFF, especially those working in ESL. Others need opportunities to hear about the framework, reflect on it, and consider if and how it fits for them. To me, the four purposes define a fully functioning individual. We've been struggling to articulate transferable skills, and maybe what we've been doing so far has been too finite. Maybe we need to consider more global goals as defined by these four purposes. The learner who has these skills will have the confidence to use them in progressively more challenging situations.

The fact is that we all have to be equipped for the future, and that's going to take time and development for educators as well as learners. *EFF* is a new way of learning for all of us; it's reflection in action. We have to hold the four purposes in front of us all the time, as we plan our programs, our lessons, and our evaluation strategies. We have to be mindful of our students' visions for themselves in everything we do. Isn't that what our work is all about? ■

Voices from the Field: Practitioners

"Equipped for the Future is philosophy and action combined"

from an interview with Bonnie Fortini,
Co-Director of Adult Education, Machias Adult & Community Education, Machias, Maine

My involvement with *Equipped for the Future* started with our state's process to develop quality indicators. There we were—practitioners, administrators, learners—working together really hard. And everyone started seeing students as PEOPLE, not just "learners"—as individuals, not aggregates. That's what the process opened up for me—that we could do things for individual students, in accordance with their own expectations.

When *EFF* hit, I was ready. I didn't get to read the first draft of *EFF* until I was stranded one day at a gas station, waiting for my daughter, who never showed up. It was a hot, miserable day, but I got so excited that I stayed to finish it even after I found out my daughter wasn't coming. I thought, "THIS is the voice of the people." I'd always been uncomfortable with things that come from on high; they just seemed to miss the mark. But this made sense. This was the way to structure quality indicators. And from then on, all my paradigms shifted.

There's nothing that doesn't fit under the four purposes—not for students or for programs themselves, or for administrators, legislators, everyone. This is a meaningful framework. It wasn't contrived; it was discovered in learners' own words, and we have to use it to reorient everyone in the system. We can use the four purposes to restructure intake and programs so that they can meet adults' needs. These four purposes are what adult education does. Everything we do, we do with these ends in the back of our minds.

What's really great about the four purposes is that they do what they say they are: they provide access and orientation, they have a voice, they allow for action, and they make a bridge to the future. This is a real tool, not just a metaphor. *EFF* is philosophy and action combined.

EFF gets to the heart of what's needed by adults to function in today's society. And what it can do for adult education is to accelerate the speed with which adults can take charge of their own learning.

I see *EFF* as a kind of trailblazing, a pathfinding. You can go in so many different directions, and people can take their own paths. Teachers can talk to students and ask them, "Why are you here? What do you want out of this program?" And when they've identified their needs, we can talk about how to apply *EFF*. The four purposes empower students to seek and find what they need to get where they're going.

EFF will take time, but if we do it right, we'll end up with people who can take care of themselves, their families, and their chosen work. We'll have people who are truly equipped for the future.

"*EFF* keeps the door wide open."

From an interview with Barbara King, Coordinator/Supervisor, Unicoi County Adult Basic Education, Tennessee

As a teacher and trainer, *EFF* gave me deeper empathy for my students and a sense of identification. It opened my mind to things students are concerned about. Sometimes teachers and administrators have a problem walking in other people's shoes. *EFF* brought important issues to the surface for my group of students, and if one group can begin to deal with this, I can see the applicability to other people across the state and the country.

We've never before had a program to help us really open people's minds to what they can do. So many students feel powerless and even victimized, but when they begin to talk together, attitudes change. In our work with other states, I was impressed to see that the New England and Appalachian groups were so close together in terms of what people said they needed—speaking out and having a voice, having rights, especially to education. They were talking with such different accents and saying the same thing. That's the point: when you get down to the students, differences go away.

As both a teacher and an administrator, I can anticipate the concerns about EFF: will there be more paperwork, are students going to be able to get their GED, are we going to lose people? I say: *EFF* isn't about doing more, but doing differently. It's about creating a real bond with students. The techniques can be in-

—Continued on next page

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Voices from the Field: Practitioners

"The whole point is putting the learner at the center."

from an interview with Louise Clifton
Adult Education Teacher
Martha O'Bryan Center
Nashville, Tennessee

It's hard to remember when I first got involved with *Equipped for the Future*, because it's such a part of me now, and so terribly important. It started in a workshop project involving civic participation. Students chose the project because of the furor over welfare; they really wanted to keep up on it. The students started to learn that they could make a difference in their own lives and their communities. At first they were dubious. One said, "you mean my vote counts as much as a rich person's?" But then they found out they could contact people and be listened to, and that helped them try harder. If you know you can make a difference, you want the skills that can help you make your best case.

EFF is about providing education that is not just short-term, or just for the GED, but for life and lifelong learning. It's truly learner-centered, and it starts with students' needs. When a group of students went to see a local legislator about a housing problem, he told them, "I can make a call about this, and I will. But if you were to get a community group working on it, that's what will really make the difference." That really hit home with the students; it told them their power was real.

Because civic participation issues affect their lives, the students want to get it right. They feel a special ownership of their work. So many students are under such pressure to get their GED, and we need to help them get a balance between academic and life skills. I try to tie civic activity to the book work, so students can see both the real-life impact of their efforts and the improvement of their skills. For any teacher, these projects give the class a focus that also builds community, where adults can feel comfortable working together on their skills and always maintaining an academic angle.

In Nashville, civic activity really began to snowball. As a result of students' interest in welfare reform and their letters to policymakers, one student was asked to serve on a state brainstorming group and got to speak to a legislative committee about her need to become self-sufficient and her concerns about welfare reform.

And civic participation projects can be really local, about neighborhood or even single school issues. Students can take on issues like problems in newspaper delivery or traffic lights at their children's schools—issues that are finite and yield quick, visible results. These day-to-day things can make all the difference in people's lives.

EFF is all about equipping students as citizens, parents, and workers. It's ultimately better than bookwork alone. It has so much more impact than straight academic instruction. This is what connects education to life. ■

King—*Continued from page 15*

corporated into different areas of academic work—GED social studies, for instance. No matter what level you're teaching, it shouldn't be just about books. Lives need to be discussed and dealt with.

GED isn't the end, and we can't just teach the GED and let students go. Sometimes they ask, "can we come back?" Sometimes with GED the only thing that's different is a piece of paper. Any teacher should want to help students with the larger themes of *EFF*, so they can live life better, be better citizens. We need to let teachers know that working with the role maps won't add time on, it will just enhance the time you have now and bring you closer to students.

Since *EFF*, my students are getting more than reading and writing. They're now more curious, ask more questions, look things up. During the election last fall, they really wanted to know what people did; they learned to separate fact from fiction. These students learned critical thinking skills that they couldn't have gotten from a book. And the lowest grade level person in the room was able to participate just as much as anybody else. They read the paper more and became more inquisitive. In reading, it's a skill to be able to anticipate what will happen next. These students learned to anticipate, which is a lot like learning how to hope.

I've been involved with adult education for 10 years, and I've learned to assume NOTHING about any student, any teacher, any person. You have to look at people one at a time and let them bring their identity to you. If you assume, if you stereotype, you'll shut the door. *EFF* helps keep the door wide open. ■

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"[EFF] will get us away from labeling where people come from... to defining where they need to go."

from an interview with Kay Albright, Senior Policy Associate, Governor's Office of Workforce Preparedness, North Carolina

What really hooked me about *EFF* were its powerful implications for all of workforce development. I think it can be the transformational tool for how we frame workforce issues and all the adult training we do. We've been searching for a context for our efforts with individual workers, and *EFF* gives us the broadest possible context.

EFF will help us shape the kinds of skills and opportunities for training and learning that we've got to provide for all workers. It will get us away from labeling where people come from—welfare, dislocation, etc.—to defining where they need to go. *EFF* gets us to think not in terms of people's deficits but in terms of the skills they have and the skills they need. In almost every case, prospective workers bring with them very strong skills; *EFF* will help them identify what they already know, as well as what they need to learn. Each of us, no matter how accomplished we are, could profit from learning new skills.

I'm very glad that *EFF* isn't being framed as only an adult education initiative, because the issue is so much broader. A lot of adult education tends to focus just on basic skills, but *EFF* embeds these skills in a broad life context that brings the world of adult education into a fuller partnership with all kinds of occupational and skills training. If we're successful, we'll be able to say that *EFF* focuses on every single skill a worker needs to do a job—and live a life.

EFF provides a real challenge to public policy. For years we've talked about defining literacy as reading, math, and maybe communication. Now we see it's also computer skills, social skills, critical thinking skills, the ability to take responsibility for career goals—those higher level skills that people like us—middle class people—need. In effect we've denied these skills to people who are poor. We haven't framed our approach to serving them on a skills model. We've said, "You're poor, so you must have all these barriers and deficits." *EFF* is organized so that all adults, regardless of background, can identify the strengths they already have and become responsible for their own future learning.

One of the real challenges posed by *EFF* is to change the current "culture" and attitude regarding adult education. For too long, we've made adult educators feel like the "red headed stepchildren;" today they need to recognize how important they are. *EFF*'s focus on all the roles of adult life—workers, parents, citizens—can help us start framing the issues of adult education differently. It will help us go to state legislators and say; "We've been talking for years about funding adult education so that adults can learn basic skills, but that's not what we mean anymore. Now we're talking about educating all workers so that they're prepared for the kinds of jobs they'll face in the 21st century." We've really got to get legislators and federal funders to understand that this is a much bigger job, with major implications for resource allocation. We need to help them build new, high expectations for educating adults, expectations that can be reached. And it's important to begin telling the story now.

Workforce development people also need to be re-educated. We tend to see some of what *EFF* is doing as "soft" skills, but at the same time we know that technical skills alone won't ensure that people get and keep jobs.

What DOES it mean to be a "lifelong learner"? *EFF* can make this label more than just another cliché that everyone accepts and no one takes seriously. We've got to have more discussion about what it means, especially for workers. One thing is sure—it means changing our conception of the kind of skills workers need if they're going to be reskilled and keep up with good jobs that pay well. No matter what aspect of human development we're involved with, we've got to be thinking about *EFF*. ■

"Standards are the best motivating and mobilizing force for education reform."

from an interview with Ken Nelson
Executive Director
National Education Goals Panel

From the perspective of the National Education Goals Panel, the work of *EFF* is very much needed. The National Education Goals are driving significant reform in the states and communities, and the NEGP is focused on promoting action and strategy toward goal achievement. EFF makes unique contributions to that effort, especially the attempt to clarify what we mean by standards.

Standards are the best motivating and mobilizing force for education reform, and when people come to know what standards are, they become wholehearted advocates. Standards aren't imposed from above; they're being developed by professionals in the field. That's another critical aspect of *EFF*—its mobilization of people. *EFF* is totally participatory, and the people in the field can genuinely own it; it's their process, it's their product. Once you have ownership, you can get persistence in the process over time. This leads to a real impact on issues like professional development, curriculum, assessment. These issues are at the core of system reform.

The *EFF* consensus building process is very impressive. It's time-consuming, but I believe strongly that it's better to go slowly and be inclusive than to rush and be exclusive. In the long run, if you include people at the front end, you win support and strengthen the process.

Standards are a continuous journey. Over time they'll be ratcheted up, but they'll always be based on the assumption that all adults can learn and that the system must provide services that meet individual needs. At the same time, standards don't dictate how services should be delivered. They give uniformity of results and of measuring results, and you get your students there the best way possible.

EFF is an extremely hopeful effort for the field. Adult educators will be able to talk about the value their programs add to people's lives. They can say, "We know what good we're doing, and we know how to get even better. We can show what we're doing through a good reporting system that's targeted to indicators and goals."

I'm deeply encouraged by EFF. I see it as of great benefit to the adult literacy community, and most people in that community, should see its benefit through enlightened self-interest: when one benefits, we all benefit. ■

"*EFF* can have a real impact on the fate of adult education."

from an interview with Irwin Kirsch, Principal Research Scientist and Executive Director, Language Learning & Assessment Group, Educational Testing Service

What impressed me about *EFF* was the idea of putting together a framework where the field would take the initiative to find out what's really important and come up with its own vision. *EFF* has enormous potential to reduce fragmentation, to bring the field together to find out what we're really about and lay out an agenda for the future. This has been a big missing piece for adult education.

EFF gives rise to a lot of hard issues—whether standards should be voluntary, what assessments should look like, who should develop curriculum. These are difficult and important questions, and people in the field have different opinions about how they should play out. But one of the strengths of *EFF*'s consensus-building process is that the field can come together to address these concerns. It's helping different players get to know each other and learn each other's agendas and perspectives. Maybe they can only reach agreement on some issues. But in a major effort like this, it's important to keep the dialogue open and the issues in front of you from the very beginning. That's how the field can get stronger, more professional, and more united.

EFF can have a real impact on the fate of adult education. Every day there's more movement toward accountability, toward national goals and standards. If adult education can't move in this direction as one field, decision-makers will say; "hey, what's going on?" The more adult educators can say: "this is who we are and where we want to go, this is what we value and stand for, these are the problems we face and how we can deal with them," the stronger is their case for survival. We have the potential for pulling the field together to say all this in EFF.

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Voices from the Field: Other Systems

"The REAL barriers for workers are low skills."

Paul Cole, Secretary Treasurer, New York State AFL-CIO and Vice Chair, National Skill Standards Board

Equipped for the Future and the National Skill Standards Board have clear, practical links around the role of the worker. The Board is encouraging employers to come to national consensus about the skills that represent excellence for workers, and literacy is part of the continuum. With *EFF*, we the opportunity to integrate approaches and taxonomies where it's meaningful and adds value for people.

The Board is focused on enhancing the competitiveness of American employers in a way that protects the quality of life for all workers. National skill standards will help employers implement high performance work strategies that can empower workers and give them a higher quality of life.

High performance work settings benefit workers, but they also can be very challenging. That's why it's important that *EFF* is defining literacy so broadly. With the ever-increasing demands in the workplace, all adult learners are being called upon to increase their skills and their ability to produce. The Board's focus is on high skills, and we have to work with other efforts to help people get there. Setting the bar high does not create barriers. The REAL barriers for workers are low skills.

What could be more empowering for workers than to know what skills are valuable to employers? Knowledge like this can help workers manage their own professional futures. Developing this information is the Board's goal, and that's why we're working with initiatives like *EFF*. We're on complementary tracks and headed in the same direction. ■

"Unless we consider the whole range of skills our workers need to live their lives, we limit their ability to be successful."

from an interview with Katherine T. Mance, Vice President for Research, Education, & Community Affairs, National Retail Federation

The National Retail Federation became interested in *Equipped for the Future* primarily because of our involvement with national skills standards. We're working hard to identify retail career paths for workers and to find ways of moving them along these paths, so we're interested in anything that helps that effort. We want to support whatever supports people choosing retail careers—and finding them rewarding and productive.

Equipped for the Future has refined and focused the definition of literacy for us. It's clearly addressing broader issues that have everything to do with the workplace and with what we're trying to create for retail workers.

One of the important features of *EFF* is the attention to skills across all adult roles. Retailers employ many part-time workers, people with families, people who are juggling a lot of responsibilities. Retention has traditionally been an issue for us. Unless we consider the whole range of skills our workers need to live their lives, we limit their ability to be successful. It's more than simple retention; it's a question of helping workers develop a commitment to the company, a sense that "I'm part of this organization, and this is where I can and want to build a career."

Our industry's concerns are human concerns. We're not training technicians to work with a particular type of machine; we're training people to work with people. We need to offer a training ground for portable skills, skills that relate to all aspects of customer relations.

The EFF standards could be the first rung on the ladder to employment success, especially for former welfare recipients and dislocated populations. These standards can be critical to our efforts as we develop a means to validate a worker's basic qualifications for employment. Adults who can demonstrate that they've met EFF standards will have a nationally acknowledged credential of their qualifications.

I think EFF is the kind of effort that retailers will instinctively support as part of their corporate culture. Retailers are concerned about people—not just customer relations but corporate and personal relations, too. We're dealing with ethical issues and work values and questions of commitment, and these are not things that you can test and use for hiring very easily. EFF standards are going to give us a way of looking at these elusive but terribly important qualities.

Here's my personal perspective, and it's both pragmatic and philosophical: if EFF achieves its goals, we should have people in the workforce who are more focused, more content, less stressed, and more in control of their lives. Workers will feel more competent and successful in every realm of their lives. That means more committed and productive employees, an improved business climate, and a more satisfied American consumer.

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- ❑ **I'm interested in learning more about *Equipped for the Future*. Please send me:**
  - ❑ *Equipped for the Future*: A Customer Driven Vision for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning (1995)
  - ❑ A Reform Agenda for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning (1997)
- ❑ **I would like to be on the *Equipped for the Future* Mailing List.**
- ❑ **I would like to be part of the *Equipped for the Future* Standard Development Process. Please put me in touch with the Development Partners for:**
  - ❑ the role of citizen ❑ the role of family ❑ the role of worker

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For more information about *EFF* or other NIFL projects, visit the *LINCS* home page at http://novel.nifl.gov

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